



LESSONS ON NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS

VIEW OF KALISPELL FROM LONE PINE STATE PARK BY JEREMIE HOLLIMAN

Learn about how to live harmoniously with wildlife at the newly renovated Lone Pine State Park visitor center. **BY L.A. CROMRICH**

People build houses on the outskirts of town for the privacy, quiet, and space. Another reason is a desire to live near elk, deer, songbirds, and other wild visitors. Unfortunately, wildlife and people don't always mix well. Bears raid bird feeders. Knapweed invades wildflower plantings. And moose have been known to migrate through picket fences.

The new visitor center at Lone Pine State Park in Kalispell could help. The center was recently renovated to help area residents and others understand and cope with the challenges that come when people build homes in what is called the "wildlife-urban interface."

During the visitor center's facelift, old exhibits were replaced with museum-quality educational displays and interactive stations that teach visitors how to live more cooperatively with wildlife and the land. The central exhibit shows a bear in front of a home, standing on a tipped garbage can, eating the contents. Visitors are challenged to find other things "wrong" with the residence, which also has an outside pet food dish, bird feeder, and pet access door. Another exhibit

L. A. Cromrich is a writer in Helena.

contains an interactive map showing where FWP has responded to complaints of nuisance grizzly bears, black bears, and mountain lions in the expanding communities of Whitefish, Kalispell, and Columbia Falls. The new exhibits challenge visitors to think about how their actions and lifestyles affect wildlife and the surrounding landscape. "Some of the new exhibits show people how to safeguard their homes against things like skunks under the porch, bats in the attic, and woodpecker holes in the siding," says Lone Pine park manager Amy Grout. "Others offer advice on how to keep dogs and cats from harassing deer and songbirds." One display explains how to identify several common noxious weeds and offers suggestions for keeping spotted knapweed, Dalmatian roadflax, and other non-native plants from invading private property and spreading to neighboring wildlands.

"Lone Pine has really become the perfect place to show people first-hand the transition zone from urban to rural," says Tom Reilly, assistant chief of the FWP Parks Division. Bordered by Kalispell on the north and east and Plum Creek and Forest Service lands to the south and west, the state park is situated

at a typical Montana wildlife-urban interface. When it became Montana's second state park in 1947, Lone Pine was in a remote, forested mountainside, 5 miles away from what was then the small logging town of Kalispell. Over time, more and more people moved into the valley. Farms and ranches were sold for housing developments, and the fingers of expansion groped their way toward the park's boundaries. Since 2000, Kalispell has grown 40 percent, to its current population of more than 22,000 residents. The surrounding Flathead County has grown by 14 percent during that time to more than 85,000 peo-

Lone Pine State Park
(406) 752-5501
fwp.mt.gov/parks

ple. Today, new housing sites nearly abut the park boundary.

Other exhibits at the visitor center focus on Lone Pine itself, from the park's presettlement history, to its beginnings as a state park, to a recent thinning project aimed at restoring the health and vigor of the park's forest lands.

In addition to its visitor center, Lone Pine provides other educational opportunities. Adult workshops teach basic skills of archery, birding, nature journaling, and snowshoeing. Special events focus on raptor viewing and

stargazing. Every Friday during summer, a program called Little Saplings provides hands-on, nature-based activities aimed at four- to seven-year-olds (typical lesson: how frogs "sing"). Local school groups from kindergarten through 12th grade visit Lone Pine each spring and fall to learn about the interaction between predators and their prey, how water moves through the natural world, how forests are managed, and more. "My kids love the park, because they have the chance to get outdoors," says Pati Bowman, a first grade teacher at Elrod Elementary in Kalispell. She says the programs at Lone Pine complement the science curricula taught at area schools. "We teach them the background in the classroom, and then get out in the field at Lone Pine and apply what they've learned. It's the best way to teach science."

"Lone Pine State Park has become the perfect place to show people first-hand the transition zone from urban to rural."

Lone Pine park ranger Melissa Sladek points out that the visitor center has become especially valuable since school districts have been forced to cut field trip budgets due to high gas prices. "We're close to town, and our education programs are free to schools, so we can offer students and teachers a great experience without asking them to spend a lot of money," she says.

The park is also a place to have fun, relax, and get a bit of exercise. Several lookout spots offer sweeping views of the valley. Hikers and walkers can follow 5 miles of trails. The park also has an archery range and a picnic area with tables and barbeque grills.

Dave Landstrom, FWP's northwestern region parks manager, sees the newly renovated visitor center as just one more amenity rounding out what was already an important educational and recreational spot for Flathead Valley residents and other visitors. "Lone Pine exemplifies the importance of having public land right at our doorstep," he says. "The park fills the need for a small wild place where you can hike, exercise the dog, and find peace and seclusion—and now, you can also learn how to be a good neighbor to wild animals and wild country." 🐻



PARK THE FAMILY HERE Located where growing residential areas abut wildlands, the newly renovated visitor center at Lone Pine is the perfect site for park guests to learn how to live harmoniously with wildlife. Clockwise from upper left: A display challenges visitors to identify things that might lure grizzlies to a residence; another display helps visitors learn to identify local native plants and animals; an exhibit provides information about harmful invasive plants, fish, and insects such as the pine bark beetle; the new entrance and gift shop.



VISITOR CENTER PHOTOS BY MONTANA FWP